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Media and Rhetoric: The Evolution of Sports Injuries

As time goes by, everything is subject to change, and the evolution of a sport is no different. Sports have been a large part of our society since approximately 400 B.C. In Ancient Greece, a main part of daily life was based off of sporting events such as modern day track and field and wrestling. These events drew thousands of people every day to one place to enjoy the games. Although there is a lot of documentation of these sports regarding the mass amount of people they drew in, there is not much evidence of the sports injuries at this time. The extent of the documentation of these injuries includes paintings on vases depicting mere nosebleeds and wrapped shoulders. At this time, there was no care to portray sports injuries to the public.

However, when modern day sports come to mind, there is a lot more documentation of professional sports injuries. These injuries are all over the modern day television, radio station, and sports newspapers. Headlines streak across your Internet browser breaking the news that your favorite running back has just tore his ACL. Just with this, a day could go from great to gloomy within the ten minutes it took to read an article. Sports injuries are all over the media in this day and age.

With this media coverage, there is always the possibility of distortion with these stories. In the past, the media have been getting a lot of hate from celebrities in particular for exaggerating, or changing their stories. <http://www.therichest.com/rich-list/most-shocking/5-of-the-medias-biggest-lies-and-hoaxes/> One very shocking over-exaggeration reported by the media was the phone hacking scandal in 2006. There were a shocking amount of reports in the news explaining how the NSA was hacking into all American, and foreign, phones to steal card numbers, and other important documents. After many different reporters searched into this topic, they found that the NSA was not hacking into any phones. The culprits were private investigators who hacked into less than 1,000 phones. If the real story were portrayed to the general public, there would be no concern. However, since the media have distorted the story to gain viewers and readers, the general public had sprung into a tizzy. These over exaggerations are also playing a large role in professional athletics. Many people write stories about these professional athletes and their injuries when in reality they have no idea what they are talking about. Many times, they can not even get the medical records of these players, so they are writing based off of rumors from other players and trainers. Media plays a large role in the distortion and over exaggeration in injuries occurring in professional athletes.

When an athlete gets injured, there are many different efforts from people that must go into getting that athlete back onto the field as quick as possible. One of the most important people to speed along the process is the doctor. Although these doctors do have your best interest, many athletes feel as though they are kept in the dark about some things. These doctors have a tendency to use confusing medical jargon while explaining the injury, treatment, and therapy for this injury. This ultimately makes the athlete put all of their faith into the doctor without knowing exactly what is wrong. With this, there could be some misconceptions for the athlete and others trying to help with the recovery. This could eventually cause more injury to the athlete if they were being treated for a different injury than the one caused. There is also a misconception in the athletes mind. Not knowing exactly what is happening to your body can cause a lot of mental anxiety. Generally, athletes are trying to get back to the sport they love as quickly as possible. When there is grey area in when they can return to their passion, there is a lot of frustration. Many athletes are kept in the dark about their injuries due to confusing medical jargon brought upon by the treating physician.

SECONDARY RESEARCH

After conducting extensive research, there were many interesting things I learned about regarding the history of sports injuries. The history of the portrayal of sports injuries dates back to centuries, and has evolved over time. In the article titled "The First Sport Injuries in the History of Medicine”, I found that the portrayal of sports injuries was very limited. Although sports played a large role in daily life in Ancient Greece, sports injuries were only documented on terracotta pots. These “injuries” only included nosebleeds and wrapped shoulders. This shows just how far the depiction of sports injuries have come looking from Ancient Greece to modern day. "Sport, Rhetoric, and Gender - Historical Perspectives” also highlights the history of sports and how important it was to culture back then. This hits on the point that although sports were as important as they are today, there was no real care about sports related injuries. Although sports played a large role in ancient society, there was no real emphasis on the documentation and portrayal of sports injuries.

Another topic that I decided to dive deeper into was the media and the distortion of issues regarding celebrities, including professional athletes. Many people see the over-exaggerated magazines at the checkout line at the grocery store. This is a perfect example of the distortion that the media has over real news. One example of media distortion in particular was highlighted in “5 of the Media’s Biggest Lies and Hoaxes”. This article highlighted the phone hacking scandal by the NSA, which caused uproar throughout the country. Although this does not have to do with sports injuries, the same behavior occurs in the sports industry. One example of this is when the movie Concussion aired. This sent many athletes into a state of fear, considering the movie was based off of the idea that extensive head injuries can lead to personality shifts, as well as death. This is a perfect example of the media over-sensualizing something that should not be worried about. The article, “NFL Doctor Says CTE is Being “over-exaggerated” explains how the movie is talking only about extreme cases, and should not be worried about for children and teens playing un-competitively. Overall, the media has a tendency to over-exaggerate many things in the media, especially surrounding sports related stories.

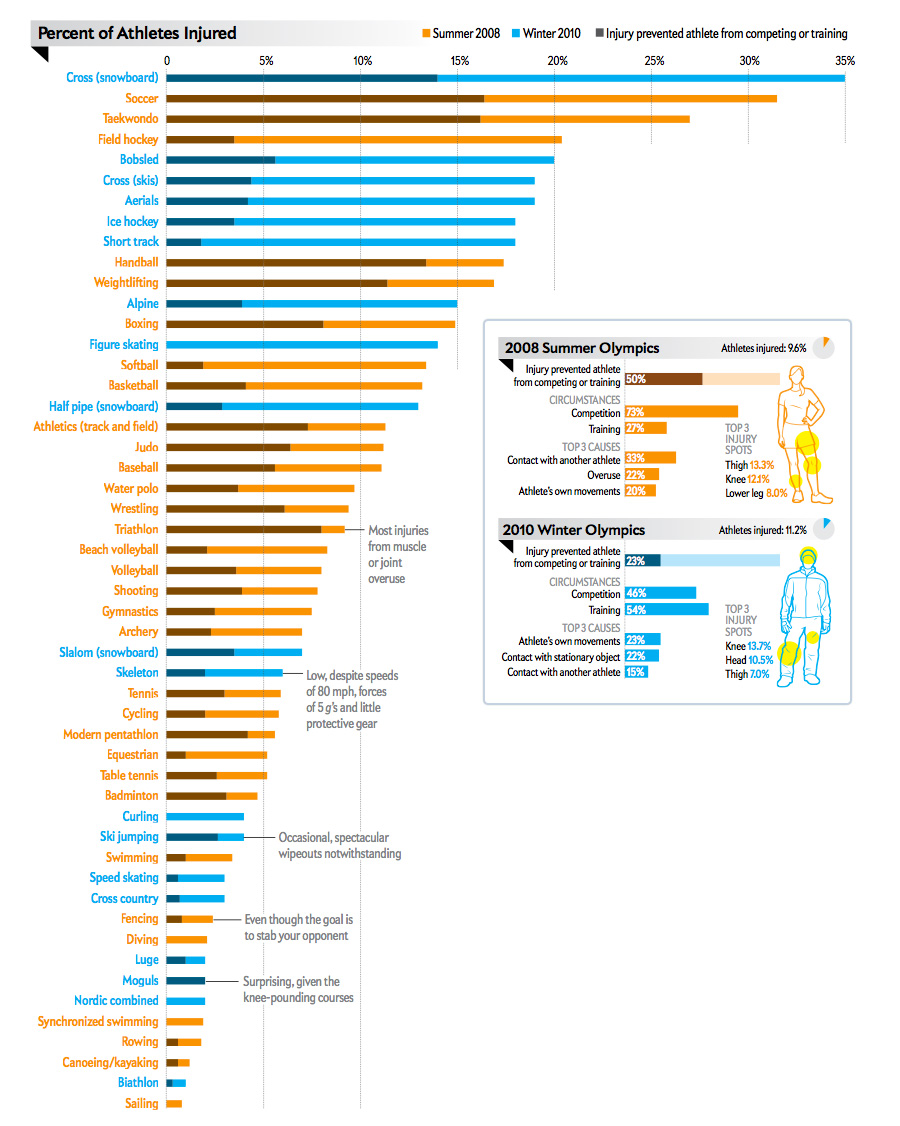
After conducting my interview, I found as though many of these articles are correct regarding sports injuries. I chose to interview one of my old teammates Kara Vana. Vana had previously suffered a meniscal tear approximately two years ago.

A meniscus tear is a common [knee injury](http://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/guide/knee-ligament-injuries). The meniscus is a rubbery, C-shaped disc that cushions your [knee](http://www.webmd.com/pain-management/knee-pain/picture-of-the-knee). Each [knee](http://www.webmd.com/pain-management/knee-pain/rm-quiz-know-your-knees) has two menisci (plural of meniscus)-one at the outer edge of the knee and one at the inner edge. The [menisci keep your knee steady](http://www.webmd.com/pain-management/knee-pain/knee) by balancing your [weight](http://www.webmd.com/diet/healthy-weight-what-is-a-healthy-weight) across the knee. A [torn meniscus](http://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/meniscustear) can prevent your knee from working right.[[1]](#footnote-1)

As decided by her doctor, she had to undergo surgery to gain back stability in her knee so that she would be able to return to Division 1 lacrosse. Vana explained her thoughts prior to the first surgery, “I felt very confident going into the first surgery, doctors seemed confident as well which comforted me”. As she was getting off of the anesthesia, the doctors had a change in their demeanor but assured her that the surgery went as planned, and everything was fixed. Vana said, “Something just didn’t seem right, I felt like there was something wrong with my knee still. It did not feel any better and was still loose”. Thinking as though that was post surgery and it would feel better later made her go home feeling unsettled. In her 3-month post op appointment, they took another MRI and found that they did not remove the entire meniscal tear, and had to go back for another surgery. “This was the worst news in the world. One surgery is bad enough and another was just going to put me further behind” Vana explained.

As Vana was going from knee appointment to orthopedic surgeon, she realized how in the dark she was about her injury. Her gut feeling right after the surgery was that something was wrong, however, the doctors did not tell her that they had missed a crucial part of her meniscus. This really took a mental strain on her as an athlete. This in turn “made me question if I was ever going to be able to play at the Division 1 level again”. This constant stress from the surgery ultimately caused her to transfer schools, allowing her to play at a Division 3 school. She explains that, “I knew after this mistake that I would never be able to catch up for the lost time this caused me. That’s why I decided to go to a school with a level I could succeed at”. Not only do doctors try to fix the physical strain from the injury, but they also have a large effect on the mental strain that goes along with it.

Since Vana was such a high-level lacrosse player, news traveled quickly. After she knew that she needed to have a second surgery, she had people coming up to her asking what happened. Not only were people questioning the injury, but some people also had wrong information. Peers were going up to Vana and asking about her ACL (anterior Cruciate Ligament). She did not have any injuries to her ACL. Trying to find the source, Vana asked around to see where they had gotten their information. After digging around she found her answer, “in a local newspaper from my hometown they had written an article explaining my “career ending injury”. I’m guessing people just assumed that it was my ACL”. Vana also expressed how frustrating it was to have the press consider the injury “career ending” when she would only be out of athletics for a couple of months. This altered media display plays along with the mental aspect of the injury. Having other people consider the injury “career ending” only makes the athlete feel negative thoughts about the possible return to athletics. In Vana’s case, the media over-exaggerated and skewed her own injury to the public, causing confusion and negative thoughts towards her arrival back to lacrosse.

Percent of Athletes Injured by Sport (Summer and Winter Olympics)

This graph clearly shows how many athletes get injured playing the sports that they love. Olympic athletes in particular have been trained to lift, practice, and play in a way that prevents injuries. However, even in these cases, injury still occurs. Also shown in the graph is the large amount of athletes who were forced to refrain from training. This plays a large part into the mental strain of the physical injury. Ultimately, the mental part of an injury could lead to quitting a sport in thought that they will never be able to return to play at the same level, such as Vana’s case.

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)